



This document is with a copy of the following article published by the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland. It is provided for non-commercial research and educational use.

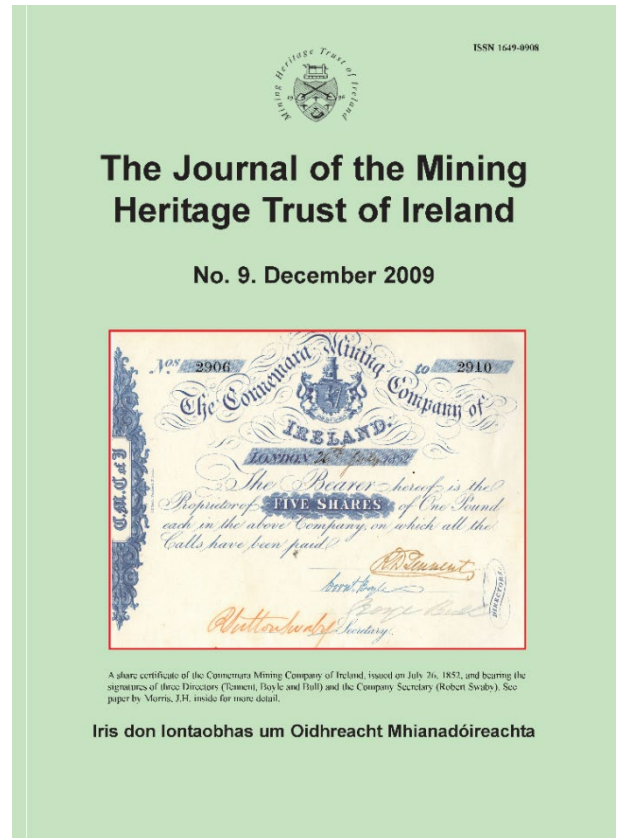
The Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland formally ceased its existence in 2019 but has provided a continuing website of resources with free access for those interested in the activities of the organisation in its various formats from 1996-2019, and in Irish mining heritage in a broader sense.

Cowman, D. (2009) 'The Mining Boom c. 1905-'08' *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 9, pp. 37-40

Copyright of this article remains with the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland whose archives, intellectual assets and library have been transferred to the Natural History Division of the National Museum of Ireland. Please contact naturalhistory@museum.ie for any enquiries relating to the MHTI.

This cover page must be included as an integral part of any copies of this document.

Please visit www.mhti.com for more information.





THE MINING BOOM C.1905-'08

by Des Cowman

Abstract: Copper prices started to improve in 1904 with prices at £57 per ton rising to almost £100 in July 1907 (after which the inevitable collapse began). This led to the establishment of a range of companies set up to exploit old sites and develop new ones (MJ 1906 & 7). Their short lives with ephemeral local benefits are recorded in the Mineral Statistics which forms the basis of most of the material here (other sources are identified). It gives annually mine owners and/or management, numbers employed with sometimes production and/or value. The following is set out by localities as some of the same personnel were involved in a range of local mines. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 9, 2009, 37-40.

WICKLOW AND WATERFORD

The person who acted as agent for the boom mines of Wicklow was one James Higgins. He had been a local agent since 1875 and acted as such again when *Cronebane Mining Company* was set up in 1905 although Tigroney seems to have been the source of the copper mined up to 1913. It was a small-scale operation with maximum of 27 employed in 1912. Similar numbers were involved in that company's other operation at Ballymurtagh, also started in 1905 but finishing in 1908.

Higgins also acted as agent for *Via Gellia Colour Co.* in Ballymurtagh where an underground operation raised ochre and umber between 1904 and 1907, 15 being the most employed. Workings there appear to have been suspended until 1910 and resumed for four years on a very small scale, only four working underground in 1912-'13, with none on surface. The same company also worked Cronebane for the same materials under Higgins between 1908 and '11 with just 4 surface workers in each of the last 3 years. The only value put on the product of their work was £131 worth in 1909-'10.

A totally different process happened in the Waterford mines around Knockmahon. As this has been reported on more fully (Cowman 2006) a summary is offered here. Four apparently unrelated companies were set up here in 1906. Nothing is known about *Irish Mines Proprietary Company Ltd.* except that their office was in Bunmahon. A *London Consolidated Trust* was set up to work the original Knockmahon (c. 1825-'50) mine which would have required them to either somehow seal the fault in the rock 700 meters out on the sea-bed or lower the level of the Atlantic! There is no record of any activity by them. Sharing some of the same personnel were the *Cone Jackson Company* set up to explore the northern extension of that lode. Already in 1906 they had 12 exploring underground (plus 8 on surface) in one location and presumably when the water-problem became obvious, moved them to two other locations the following year. At one, Kildwan, they started to build a concrete office the unfinished remains of which stands (Figure 1). They were gone by 1908.

A great deal is known about *Bunmahon Copper Mining Syndicate* set up to reopen Tankardstown which had been closed since the mid 1870s. Some of this knowledge comes because so many local people were directors and shareholders

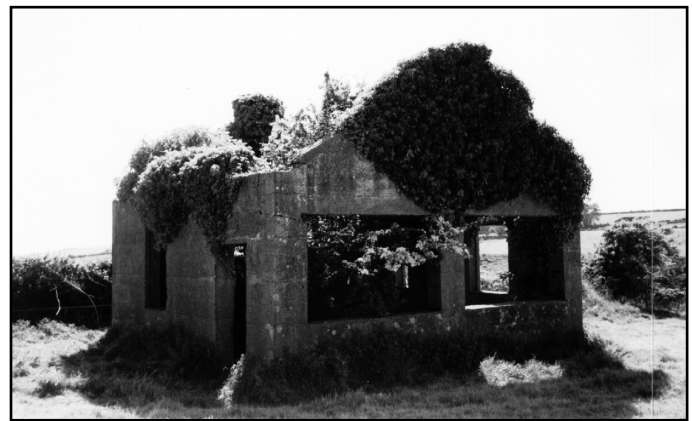


Figure 1. The unfinished Cone Jackson office near Knockmahon.

and some from the company's penchant for publicity. They began operations in 1906 and by the following year had 123 employed, 69 on the surface which suggests they may have been processing the old waste tips. That produced 270 tons of 5.2% copper. They continued to extol their own potential but employed only 50 (30 underground) in 1908 producing 100 tons of 4% copper. Already, amid recriminations, in 1907 steps were being taken for the dissolution of the company although this was not finalised until 1910.

One other belated attempt to resuscitate a mine took place in Ardmore in 1908 probably under the auspices of Edmund Spargo and Sons of Liverpool. Oral traditions about the antics of his associate, Londoner Harry Ferguson, have already been published (Quain 1993). A new one has since emerged but it is typical of the others.

My Grandfather R.P. Keating, who was a Principal school master in Co. Kilkenny used to take annual holidays with his family in premises owned by his wife in Ardmore. My Grandmother ran a Guest House there in the summer months and Spargo stayed as a lodger with them. Grandad became friendly with him and recorded some engineering data at the mine on weekends when Spargo was otherwise engaged.

An old man from the village related several "stories" to me about Spargo's (business manager, Harry Ferguson's) activities. He made a "Grand Entrance" it seems, by

flashing notes of a larger denomination than usually seen in the local hostelrys, buying drinks for all, recruiting labour, renting accommodation and generally enjoying himself in the village. His stories and promises of "a new era of prosperity for the Ardmore community was widely and well received and when a cart load of new pick-axes, shovels, crowbars etc, arrived at Grandmother's house to the order of Mr Ferguson with "Pro Forma" invoice from one of the Youghal Hardware firms, the visions of "riches for all" must have seemed secure at last. I am not sure if the poor woman paid it in his absence but Grandad's silence on the matter, in later years, suggested that she may well have done so. After the initial "softening up" process his credit rating had soared and nothing was too good for Mr Ferguson. The bubble, however, eventually burst but the "bird had flown" leaving a number of creditors, among the largest of whom were the Youghal firm and, in all likelihood, my unfortunate Grandmother (*pers. comm.*).

WEST CARBERY

There was little mining homogeneity about this widespread part of west Cork. A *Coosheen Minerals Ltd.* was established in May 1906, aspiring to £25,000 capital but raising only £5,000. Most of the shareholders were from the London area, the largest being Thomas Tancred (£320). A veteran of the area, Thomas Williams, was among the two vendors and they had employed one J. Andrew Wauchope to test Coosheen. His report gives not only copper but an unlikely gold and silver as well! (Guildhall ms.). The reality was 28 tons of copper in 1906 (16 employed, half underground) -'07 (4 employed) after which mining ceased and presumably the company went into liquidation thereafter. At nearby Ballycummisk *Irish Mineral Development Syndicate* had been set up in 1903, before the boom, although its brief was "to acquire lands or rights in any part of the world". The £7,000 plus that they raised in London got them a lease of 191 acres from the man who formerly mined there, A.S. Cave. Among the shareholders was an engineer appropriately named E.J. Coppermann. That seems to be the closest they got to copper, not availing of the boom, and in 1906 it passed into the hands of the *West Carberry Copper Estate Company Ltd.* (WCCEC, not formally registered in London until Jan. 1908) who also took leases on nearby Cappagh and Rosbrin (BT --/76197).

The semi-aspirational name Wauchope comes up frequently again in other local mines followed by his successor Stanner. Ballycummisk, was the WCCEC Ltd.'s biggest operation starting in 1906, numbers varying up to closure in 1911, but maximum of 28. Wauchope and Stanner were shown as successive agents here in 1908-'11. Likewise they were involved in the short-lived (1907-'09) testing (4 surface workers in '07) at Cappagh. The same was probably also true of Rosbrin in 1907 where they had five underground and two on surface, but presumably these drew blank. Associated also with these operations was a Thomas Tancred (presumably the same major shareholder in Coosheen) who held the lease from Arthur Cave up to April 1908 when he resigned and was replaced by Arthur Drysdale of Dunferlin, which may have had something to do with financing by the Edinburgh (sic) Life Assurance Company. While operations ended in 1911, the company was not formally dissolved until March 1915 (BT --/96624).

The same company also worked somewhere on Dumanus Bay between 1907 and 1913 with 8 to 10 workers, but Wauchope and Stanner were recorded as "owners" of this. At Glan there was testing for copper in 1905 but it was "discontinued" in 1906. Nevertheless the two crop up as owners 1909-'11. A *Cork Mineral Syndicate* had 16 men under-ground at a lead silver location at Killeenavenogue in 1905 only, plus 8 surface workers and this again was taken over by the pair in 1909-'11. Similarly a *Toormore Copper Mining Syndicate* was established by 1908 to work in that townland (4 underground, 1 on surface). In 1909 it was "discontinued" but was then taken over successively by the two. Wauchop is identified as "agent" in 1907 at Leamcon on a small operation that opened the previous year (6 underground, 5 surface) but closed thereafter. One wonders what illusions drove, first Wauchope and then Stanner, around these little mineral locations in West Carbery.

The boom also affected barytes though it outlasted the copper boom. The name associated with this is E. Storer. He reopened Scart in 1906 but the following year it was "discontinued" and resumed in 1908 by the *Liverpool Barytes Co.* (who were also running Derryginagh); the local manager is recorded as E. Storer suggesting a continuity. In 1910 it was again "discontinued", this time presumably permanently. Duneen was reopened in 1905 by a William Gunn employing 14 men. Then a *Liverpool Duneen Bay Mineral Company* was established in 1907 but dissolved it the following year to set up *Liverpool Barytes Company* (BT --/9633) How or why the flooded workings were taken over by them goes unrecorded but by 1910 they had unwatered it to a depth of 60 fathoms (about 115 meters). They then had had 16 underground and 30 surface workers, building up to 24 and 49 in 1913. E. Storer oversaw this also between 1909 and 1913. They continued working there over the war years, extending their operation to the adjoining Mountain townland. Altogether they raised about 39,000 tons of barites over ten years. Duneen was worked again twice thereafter. Derryginagh was revived in 1906 with ownership 1907-'13 again by *Liverpool Barytes Co. Ltd.*. The height of their operation seems to have been 1908 to 1911 when employment was in the high 50s petering to 5 in 1913. Somehow E. Storer oversaw this also from 1906-1913.

This pattern is not true for all the West Cork mines. Allihies had been a magnet for prospecting ever since closure in 1884 and this continued up to the 1990s (Williams 1991, p.174-190). Relevant here is an operation by London-based *Berehaven Copper Mines Ltd.* under a Harold J. Harris which took place at Common Moor (possibly Mountain) from 1901 that had 71 maximum employed by 1903 (half underground) declining to 20 in 1905 as the boom was under way. However a *Cluain Copper Development Syndicate Ltd.* was established in 1904, again under H.J. Harris, and had 12 to 15 people employed in "exploration" over the next five years, presumably with little success. However an anonymous company (Harris?) worked part of Allihies from 1903 to 1905 producing over £3,400 worth of ore but none is recorded thereafter although a *Berehaven Syndicate Ltd.* came into existence in 1906 (BT --/89400). Allihies was formally recorded as "discontinued" in 1907. An Abandonment Plan was lodged in GSI the following year, signed by Harris, and showing an adit over 600 metres long though mainly barren ground (GSI Mine Plans).

South of there a *West British Development Syndicate* of Liverpool commenced operations at Brow Head in 1905 and on the adjoining townland of Borlin the following year. This latter only lasted 3 years with 13 or 14 men working, about half underground. Brow Head started with 23 clearing underground and five on the surface but these numbers were progressively reduced and it closed in 1911. What the relationship was between this Liverpool company and *Brow Head Copper Mines Ltd.* is not clear as that company lasted only a hundred days in 1906! (BT-- /89313). The remains of the boom operations are still visible there (O'Sullivan, 2006). A London-based *Schull Bay Copper Mining Company* was established in 1906 by J.W. Voyce to work on Coney Island. With a stated capital of £9,000, it had about 20 employed over two years, half underground. Having produced a grand total of 17 tons of copper, at a general meeting in Oct. 1908 the shareholders called for the appointment of a liquidator (BT --/88325). Nearby at Ballydehob there was a gesture towards reopening in 1906 by a J.H. Twaite & Co. with 6 underground and 8 on surface. Presumably, another unsuccessful trial.

Manganese too benefited from the boom. A *Liverpool Manganese Company* took over the old workings at Glandore in 1907. They started with 25 workers (14 underground), had 29 in 1909 (20 underground) declining thereafter and finishing in 1911.

OTHER LOCATIONS

A *Kerry Mines Syndicate Ltd.* may have had wider ambitions than the townland of Coad when it was established in 1907. Four were employed. Perhaps it was they who were involved in an attempted reopening of Ardtully, Kenmare under the even more ambitious title *The Southern Mines of Ireland Ltd.* in 1910 becoming a more modest *Ardtully Copper Mines Ltd.* over the next two years. However two different Dublin addresses were involved. The mine produced 59 tons of copper in 1911, worth only £66. In 1913 it was "abandoned". Somewhat more successful in Meath was the *Beaupark Mining Company Ltd.* that came into existence in 1908 and at the height of its operation in 1912 had 80 people employed, 57 of them underground under the management of a Robert Murray. This was apparently a new discovery and shone briefly for the richness of its ore. Between 1911 and '13 it produced nearly a thousand tons of copper worth £7, 219. By the end of the latter year it was "discontinued".

Something similar applied to three revivals in Galway. An ambitiously named *Galway Mining Company* took over what was called Hodgeson mine near Oughterard in 1907. It employed some 23 workers, all on the surface so this must have been an exploratory exercise. Presumably it was unproductive as it was gone by 1910. *Clements Lead Mines Ltd.* had 64 workers at the eponymous location by 1907, all on the surface. While this was the highest number employed, over the years up to 1911 employment fluctuated but most of the workers were underground. The only record of production is two tons in 1908. An ambitiously named *Hibernian Copper Syndicate Ltd.* was established in 1907 to work Cleggan. The following year it was gone (BT --/93267).

The Mineral Statistics make no mention of *Ballyhickey Mining Company Ltd.* who had aspirations to open that eponymous lead mine in Clare in 1907. The relationship between this and its apparent take-over by a company from the French Congo in 1911 goes unexplained! (BT --/91973)

A strange lead-silver mine, to judge from the Mineral Statistics, was at Glentogher near Carndonagh, Co. Donegal. Four men working underground reportedly raised 1,800 tons of ore in 1905-'06, worth £1,700 and then no more was heard of it. There is obviously a story behind this.

Many of the Antrim iron mines were in operation over this "boom" period but do not seem to have been subject to the same economic forces that affected other minerals. Some such as Graigahullia near Portrush happened to coincide with the boom period. It was worked for iron between 1906 and 1910 with maximum employment in 1909 of 18 people.

More typical of those operating before and after this period are mines of the Belfast-based *Antrim Iron Ore Company Ltd.* at Ballylig (1883 & 1899-1909), Clontrace (1880s & 1899-c. 1920), Eassathohan (1899-c.1920 also alum clay), Glenarm (1869-1896; 1901-1909), Mount Cashel (1916- c.1918), Parkmore (1882-1888; 1890-1896; 1901-c.1920) and Rathkenny (1877-1896; 1901-c.1920). This is only a sampling of the complex of iron and alum mines in Antrim which may have its own patterns and certainly needs further study

REFERENCES

- BT (Board of Trade) PRO Kew, London. For fuller context and explanation see Morris, John H. and Cowman, Des in *MHTI Journal* 1 (2001), pp 9-18. The relevant numbers are the last group being the company number.
- BT 31/11573/89400 *Berehaven Syndicate Ltd.*
- BT 31/10162/76197 *Irish Mineral Development Syndicate.*
- BT 31/11573/89313 *Schull Bay Copper Mining Company.*
- BT 31/11573/89313 *Brow Head Copper Mines Ltd.*
- BT 31/11962/93267 *Hibernian Copper Syndicate Ltd.*
- BT 31/11838/91973 *Ballyhickey Mining Company Ltd.*
- Cowman, Des *The Making and Breaking of a Mining Community* (MHTI 2006) pp 145-159.
- Guildhall (London) ms. 18,000 (Dr. 14), *Coosheen Minerals Ltd.*, Applications for Listing, 105B 315.
- MJ Mining Journal 1906-'07 passim gives updated on copper prices.
- O'Sullivan, Paddy "The mines of Sheeps Head and Mizen Head Peninsulas, county Cork" (*MHTI Journal* 6, 2006) pp 31-36.
- Pers. Comm.. This took the form of a forwarded e-mail: however, a change of computer meant that the provenance is lost. The original was from one of the Keating family in Kilkenny; apologies to the person who was kind enough to forward it to me.
- Quain, J.T. "Harry will be home next week!", *Ardmore Journal* No. 10, (1993) pp 31-33.
- Williams, Alan *The Berehaven Copper Mines* (Northern Mines Research Society, May 1991), pp 179-190.